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SENATE BILL 718 By
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HOUSE BILL 1014
By DeBerry J

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 2, Part 1, relative to released time education.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 2, Part 1,

Is amended by adding the following new sections thereto:

Section _____. When parents request released time religious education to a board of education, that board shall establish a policy and guidelines for released time education for religious moral instruction for at least one class period each week and such classes may take place on a regular five-day per week schedule. Boards of education shall follow parental requests to substitute released time for such classes as family life or sex education, guidance, character education, related arts, conflict resolution, drug awareness, and electives. If any parents request released time religious education for their children in public school, the board of education shall excuse a student to participate in such religious moral instruction in accordance with their religious faith, subject to the following minimum requirements:

(1) There is a released time provider of instruction and a location which meets parental approval within close proximity of the school, not further than five

(5) miles, and not crossing any county or state boundaries. The five (5) mile restriction shall not apply to any released time program in existence upon the effective date of this act;

(2) The released time activity will be conducted off public school property.

(3) Students must have written permission from their parent/guardian prior to participation in released time programs.

(4) No released time costs shall be paid by the public school system.

(5) Attendance records shall be kept and a copy provided to the school.

(6) Released time classes will coincide with school class schedules.

(7) Liability insurance shall be maintained by the host facility or instruction provider on the student participants while attending released time activities.

Section _____. Neither the school system, nor any entity of the state government, will incur any liability during a released time program. Parents, when signing parental approval for their children to attend this off-campus program waive any right to hold the public education system or the state liable. The state is not responsible for the program, its providers, nor the content. Released time teachers are exempted from state certification on religious grounds. Their selection rightly belongs to parents and/or religious leaders in the community. Released time is simply an open-door policy which provides public school students the freedom to also receive religious moral education at religious institutions as an elective part of their regular school day.

Section _____. Pupils who attend released time classes shall be credited with time spent as if they had been in actual attendance in school and the time shall be calculated as part of the actual school day. "Custodial credit" is not adversely affected by released

time, therefore there is no effect on funding for the school. Pupils shall not be penalized for any school work missed during released time.

SECTION 2. This act shall take July 1, 2001, the public welfare requiring it.